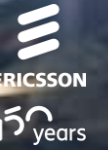


Connected sports and entertainment 2026



Twenty cities in the US, Canada, and Mexico will host pinnacle sports events in 2026. This report covers the role of public and private 5G networks in supporting fans and business operations to deliver the great destination experiences millions of fans expect.

For the Broader Technology Ecosystem

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Introduction

Twenty cities in the US, Canada, and Mexico host pinnacle sports events in 2026, attracting very large numbers of global fans. Fans who expect destination experiences and are dependent on mobile connectivity during the whole duration of their stay. A diverse user group encompassing casual fans, FANatics, VIPs, and Corporate Sponsors.

Ericsson has put together an overview of the five areas where public and private 5G network capabilities can make a difference in the overall experience.

Enjoy the read, on insights, evidence, and actions that can take you down a similar path!

Disclaimer: The insights, evidence, and proposed actions presented in this report are based on current thinking from respected thought leaders and facts from sources believed to be accurate and trustworthy. However, Ericsson makes no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy, completeness, or reliability of this information. Ericsson expressly disclaims all liability for any legal claims, damages, losses, or consequences arising from or related to these forward-looking statements, the use of proprietary or publicly available data, or the application of any proposed actions contained herein. Users rely on this report entirely at their own risk. This report is intended solely to advance strategic conversations on industry topics across the broader technology ecosystem and should not be construed as professional advice, a guarantee of outcomes, or a basis for business decisions without independent verification and professional counsel.

Digital augmentation of fan experiences at venues

Reduce friction in fan facing lines

Add new angles to media productions

Network priority for security and first responder staff

Global sports fans expect destination experiences

Digital augmentation of the fan experiences at venues

Seven opportunities to enhance live event
experiences for professional sports & concerts

Fans' live experiences improve with digital augmentations, and 5G has become the primary way to connect fans at venues.

What is new: 6 years into the deployment cycle, 5G has matured into the primary wireless access at sports and entertainment venues, with the potential to scale further.

Why it matters: Deploying multiple 5G networks, plus a public 5G network at each venue, limits the potential for scaling.

Problem: Live sports and music events have high fan appeal, and ticket prices are surging. All fans visiting a venue have smartphones, and they expect organizers to elevate the digital experience. Fans today expect the live experience to be digitally augmented and to match what they pay for.

Target outcomes: The digital augmentation of the user experience varies between sports and concerts. All tickets are now digital. You can pick up an alternative view on your phone. Live sharing of pictures and videos on social media is widely adopted. Data, audio, and video overlays on your phone take experiences to the next level.

Solution innovations: Public 5G networks at large venues can now be dimensioned for very high concentrations of people and high capacity in both directions (downlink and uplink), using a combination of mid-band and mmWave access and spectrum. The fan zone extends beyond the venue itself into surrounding areas to support fan tailgating and in-transit activities in and out of the venue.



The annual football final has set the scene for innovations with potential to scale to major venues across the continent.

>100 5G venues: The annual football final in Miami was the first to offer public 5G services to connect fans in 2020. The scaling of public 5G has then occurred across major professional sports venues and today reaches more than 100 indoor and outdoor venues in the United States.

5G versus Wi-Fi: 5G and Wi-Fi have evolved in parallel, but at the annual football final in 2025, there was a shift in the traffic patterns where 5G continued to grow, but Wi-Fi dropped by 50%, resulting in a 3:1 ratio of 5G and Wi-Fi traffic. These are early indicators that investments could tilt to one of the two technologies in the future.

Performance assurance: Ericsson found that 4 in 10 eventgoers are prepared to pay a premium for connectivity with performance assurance at events. The premium that event-goers are willing to pay varies between 5% and 15% of the ticket price.

Room to grow: There are 246 sports venues in the US with more than 20,000 seats. The further scaling up of 5G at sports and entertainment venues is correlated to the reduction of multiple parallel wireless network infrastructures.

Bottom line: As 5G networks scale in sports and entertainment venues, they can become the primary access for fans.

>100 Public 5G today serves more than 100 sports and entertainment venues in the United States¹

3:1 The ratio between 5G and Wi-Fi data traffic at the football final in 2025²

40% Of event goers are prepared to pay a premium for network performance assurance³

246 There are 246 sports and entertainment venues in the US with more than 20,000 seats⁴

1.) Quarterly reports from US Tier 1 5G providers

2.) [New reality or anomaly: Super Bowl 59 Wi-Fi usage off dramatically](#), Stadium Tech Report, February 27, 2025

3.) [5G meeting consumer demands at big events](#), Ericsson ConsumerLab, November 5, 2024

4.) [List of U.S. stadiums by capacity](#), Wikipedia, March 23, 2026

Status Quo

A mixed bag of wireless networks at venues

One or several 5G networks for fan engagement, deployed by different service providers

Wi-Fi network for fan engagement deployed and upgraded by the venue owner

Wired networks, or operations-specific Wi-Fi networks, support the transformation of business operations at venues

Take a Step

Upgrade 5G to become the primary venue access

Venue networks are dimensioned to support the diverse needs and traffic patterns for both sports and music fans.

Multiple service provider-specific 5G solutions deployed at the same venue

Public Wi-Fi capacity investments capped

Build Momentum

Upgrade the 5G network to a neutral-host solution that serves all fans at the venue.

Upgrading the network to a 5G neutral host network at venues with the capacity to serve all fans and all their communication needs.

Enabling tailored connectivity tiers for different groups of fans (General admission, Bleacher seats, Corporate suites, and Sponsor representatives)

Public Wi-Fi is supported and maintained as a backup to the primary 5G services

Lead Change

Hybrid public/private 5G at venues

Adding virtual private cellular network capabilities to a single shared wireless network infrastructure, serving public use for fans and private use for business operations at the venue.

Reduce friction and staffing in fan-facing lines



Address the five lines at venues that cause friction among fans and require high staffing

Great venue networks can address five common lines to eliminate fan friction and reduce associated staff requirements

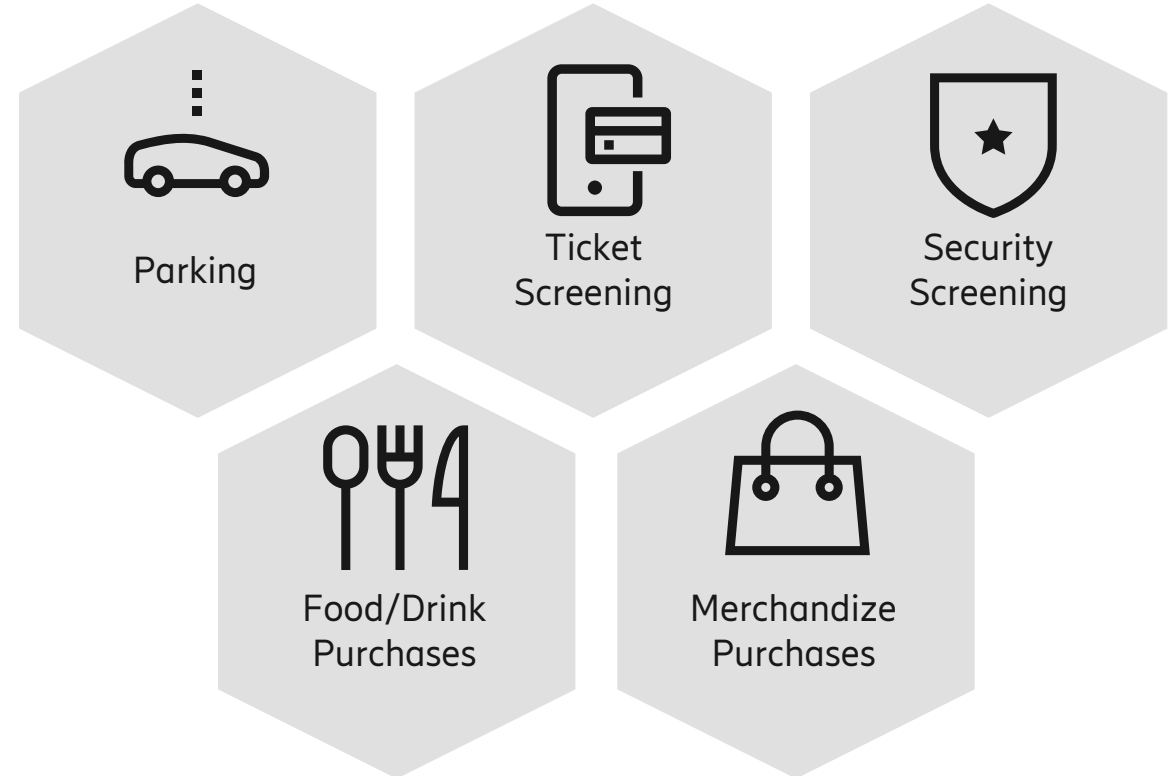
What is new: Venue networks have expanded from public 5G servicing fans directly to also introduce private 5G or virtual private 5G capabilities to support business operations at venues.

Why it matters: The time fans spend in lines at venues creates friction and requires high staffing for short periods during an event.

Problem: The large quantities of visiting fans touch many common business processes. Processes causing lines are today either unconnected (parking, security screening), reliant on universal connectivity (ticket screening), or using unreliable and slow technologies (payment terminals).

Target outcome: Minimize the time to find parking (before the event) and to retrieve a car (after the event). Provide secure mobile screening of digital tickets before entering. Reduce the time for security screening of fans at venue entry. Reduce the time required to order and pay for food, drink, and merchandise.

Solution Innovations: Private 5G networks or slices of a public 5G network tailored to the specific needs of each business operation. Priority connectivity for smartphones used for parking assistance and staff ticket screening. Security screening devices connected via cellular network. Payment terminals connected over low-latency 5G slices.



Reducing friction in fan facing lines protects a quarter to a half of the revenues for the major professional sports leagues in the US.

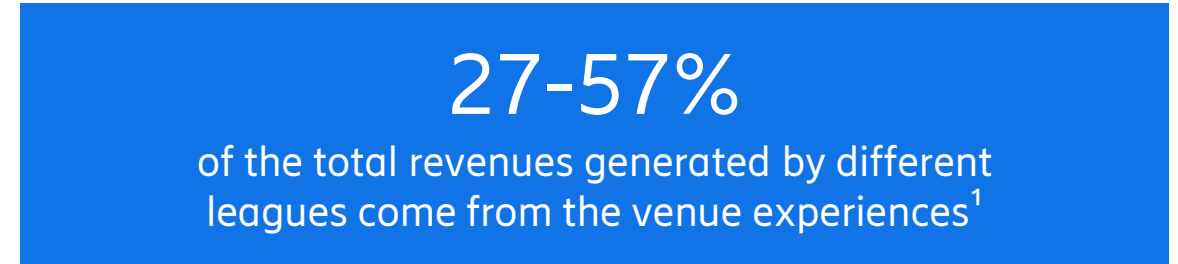
Big spread in the revenues generated in venues: Venue-generated revenues for professional sports come from seating, suites, concessions, and parking. MLS has the highest share of revenues from venues at 57%, and the NFL has the lowest at 27%.

Just-in-time arrival: Many fans arrive very close to the start of games and races. The number of vehicles involved can reach 25,000 for a football game and 8,000 for a basketball game. The just-in-time arrival put pressure on parking, ticketing, and security screening.

Food and Beverage: Purchases of food and beverages are typically concentrated in very short periods, e.g., during breaks in a game. Digital technology can increase efficiency in both order handling and payment workflows.

Licensed merchandise: Less than 1/3 of licensed merchandise purchases happen online, and venues play a vital role in offline purchases. Efficient payments are a key focus to maximize merchandise purchases when fans are motivated and eager to buy.

Bottom line: 5G connectivity tailored for low latency is a powerful tool in eliminating friction in fan-facing lines at venues.



1.) [Visualized: How U.S. Sports leagues make money](#), VisualCapitalist, July 23, 2024.

2.) [2025 Spectator sports safety security survey](#), The University of Southern Mississippi, September 3, 2025

3.) [The NFL Fan and Stadium experience: 2024-2025 post season report](#), MashGin, January 23, 2025 .

4.) [Licensed sports merchandise market \(2026-2033\)](#), Grand View Research

Status Quo

Universal connectivity for ticket screening using smartphones

Universal connectivity to smartphones (4G, 5G, or wireless alternatives) is provided to staff for screening of digital tickets at entry.

Payment terminals are connected via wired networks or alternative wireless technologies.

Take a Step

Differentiated connectivity for ticket screening

Adding differentiated connectivity optimized for digital ticket screening (high reliability and low latency) using smartphones connected over a virtual private 5G portion of the public 5G network.

Build Momentum

Adding differentiated connectivity to payment terminals

Adding differentiated connectivity optimized for payment terminals with 5G interfaces connected over a private 5G or virtual private 5G portion of a public 5G network.

Lead Change

Tailored experiences for all devices to minimize friction

5G interfaces in all devices used in fan-facing lines connected with differentiated connectivity options, optimized for each business process.

Add new angles to media productions

Explore four opportunities to elevate media productions with new camera angles

Connected cameras give media producers new ways to deliver fan experiences on TVs, tablets, smartphones and beyond

What is new: Private 5G and Virtual Private 5G networks can connect cameras used in professional media productions, eliminating the need for wires between cameras and production centers.

Why it matters: Sports media productions are essential to leagues and media houses, and they continually innovate to elevate the media experience for fans away from venues.

Problem: Competition among broadcasters for sports media rights is fierce. Sports depend on having a big share of their revenues coming from media deals. It is vital to engage fans between competitions through engaging media experiences.

Target outcomes: Increase flexibility by connecting stationary and roaming TV cameras in live productions without wires. Connect remotely operated cameras in hard-to-reach locations without wires. Add new, widely available low-cost camera options. Reduce steps and minimize the time required for still photography workflows from capture to publishing.

Solution: Media production cameras connected to private 5G or virtual private 5G networks with upstream capacity and latency dimensioned for real-time media productions. Video and still cameras connected with novel 5G Portable Data Transmitters. High-end smartphones introduced as tools for video production with athletes, “fantographers,” and at smaller events.



Broadcast TV cameras on the move



Remotely operated Broadcast TV cameras



Smartphones used in media productions



Still photographers

Leveraging 5G networks as a tool for media productions puts reliability, uplink capacity, and latency capabilities in focus

Media production importance: The TV and streaming rights for sports in the US were projected to reach \$29.25 billion in 2025. Doubling from 2015 and projected to grow to \$ 37 billion in 2030. Sports media rights play an important role in a streaming channel's appeal. With higher rights fees and higher consumer prices come expectations of higher production quality.

Outside broadcast productions: High-end sports productions are complex. Especially at outdoor venues with few events per year. The media production at the professional American Golf Tour supports its tournaments with 9 production trailers onsite, up to 72 cameras, 150 microphones, and 35-80 miles of fiber-optic cable.

Uplink capacity: Media production reverses the requirement on mobile networks, as data traffic flows from cameras to the cloud. Live Broadcast productions require 35 Mbps for Full HD and 60 Mbps for 4K per camera³. Live productions require guaranteed uplink capacity, low latency and high reliability to be unwired.

Still photographers: 1,600 still photographers covered the games in 2024. Each photographer can generate up to 10k still pictures in a day. 5G-connected cameras transform the editing and publishing flow and enable instant publishing.

Bottom line: Private 5G and virtual private 5G networks have been battle-tested at pinnacle events and can scale out to larger productions.

\$29.25B
value of the US sports TV and streaming rights in 2025¹

35-60
Mbps of required uplink capacity required for Full HD or 4K video³

1.) [Sports rights in the US expected to reach \\$37 Billion by 2030](#), S&P Global, April 7, 2025

2.) [PGA Tour Trucks deliver new era in Broadcasting](#). Global Golf Post, February 29, 2024

72
the typical number of cameras required to cover a professional golf tournament²

1,600
still photographers covered the summer games in 2024⁴

3.) [5G and Network APIs are enhancing live media productions](#), Ericsson Mobility Report,

4.) [Paris 2024 Summer Olympics](#)., Alpha Sports Pro

Status Quo

Media productions limited to wired cameras

All video cameras in media productions are wired to the production center.

All video cameras are manned by a cameraman or woman.

All still cameras are dependent on sequential workflows from capture to publishing, staffed by 1-3 people present at venues (photographer, media card runner, editor)

Take a Step

5G connected cameras with near-live capabilities

Video cameras connected to public 5G networks via universal connectivity, without uplink, latency, or reliability guarantees. Limiting the practical use to wireless transmission of recorded video.

Still cameras connected to public 5G with editors operating in cloud-based workflows. Competing for uplink capacity with fan activities

Build Momentum

Private 5G networks for media productions at venues

Private 5G networks, dimensioned for media production, are deployed in parallel with public 5G networks.

Differentiated connectivity option tailored to the needs of live video productions

Differentiated connectivity option tailored to the needs of still photographers, with a high-traffic burst during competition action peaks.

Lead Change

Hybrid venue networks for public and virtual private 5G

One common 5G infrastructure for public 5G and virtual private 5G needs at venues.

Priority for professional media productions over fans' live sharing on social media

Network priority for security and first responder staff



Security and first responders are vital functions that need priority access in and around venues

Security staff and first responders' communication goes beyond the needs of fans and businesses

What is new: The connectivity requirements for security staff and first responders at major events grow with the type and size of the event.

Why it matters: Security and first-responder efforts at pinnacle events reached 20 cities in Canada, Mexico, and the US this year.

Venue security: A mix of human security staff and equipment, including surveillance cameras and drone detectors. Reliable communication within the group is vital, especially to proactively prevent incidents and for larger unplanned movements of visitors.

EMTs: Planned to serve athletes and move around visitors where they are and to specific aid locations. Communications between the two latter teams are essential for quickly getting the moving force to visitors in need and for the interactions between the mobile team and stationary aid locations. EMTs plan for a higher level of readiness at warm-weather events.

Law enforcement: The third major staff category is law enforcement. The role and the number of staff required vary between sports.

Inter-agency communication: The larger the event is, the higher the demand gets for communication in between agencies at various levels.



The number of staff dedicated to security and well-being grows significantly with the size and importance of an event

Secure Event Assessment Rating (SEAR): The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has defined five tiers for security assessments at major events. The two top levels (1 and 2) involve federal and inter-agency support in planning and execution of the events.

Large public safety undertaking: FirstNet prepared for the soccer tournament this summer by investing \$430 million over three years to support 300+ agencies across 140 venues in the 11 US host cities. The effort involved more than 2,000 different network enhancements in total.

Security professionals: A large category of staff, operating security gates and bag screening at entry and throughout the venue. These security professionals are vital to managing large flows of people in real time. One security professional per 150 visitors is a rule of thumb, but numbers vary widely depending on the specifics of an event.

Agencies engaged during: EMTs care for athletes and visitors in the event of emergencies. Uniformed law enforcement can range from 300 for a regular-season football game to double that for the big soccer tournament. With a typical split-half inside and half outside the venue.

Bottom line: Security staff and First responders have the highest communication requirements in and around venues. In addition to high requirements, it is important that communication solutions span all involved agencies consistently.



1.) [Fact Sheet: What are Special Event Assessment Rating \(SEAR\) Events?](#) Department of Homeland Security

2.) [FirstNet and the summer of soccer: Putting public safety first](#), June 15, 2026

3.) [Big events, bigger risks: How teams keep large events safe](#), Security Magazine, February 3, 2025

4.) [The systems that can fail: Six vulnerabilities to address before major events](#), Police1, November 21, 2025.

Status Quo

Bespoke wireless networks for security and first responder staff

Bespoke wireless networks for security staff and first responders

No integration/coordination of communication capabilities between different first responder agencies

Take a Step

Universal mobile connectivity for security and first responder staff

Communication between security staff and first responders with standard smartphones.

Universal connectivity over mobile networks without distinction between fans, businesses operating at venues, security staff, and first responders.

Build Momentum

Dedicated networks capabilities for security staff and first responders

Dedicated mobile network solutions for security and first responder staff.

Purpose-built mobile devices match the needs of different user profiles.

Dedicated networks/slices with tailored characteristics to serve each profession active at the venue.

Dimensioned to match the difference in size and communication patterns between different agencies.

Lead Change

Dynamic allocation of differentiated connectivity

A common mobile infrastructure for fans, business operations, security staff, and first responders in and around venues

Security and first responder staff requesting venue connectivity on demand, and priority in emergency situations.

Global sports fans expect destination experiences

Global fans at pinnacle events depend on connectivity wherever they go during their trip

The pinnacle events in sports attract a broad mix of global fans in large numbers, staying for extended periods

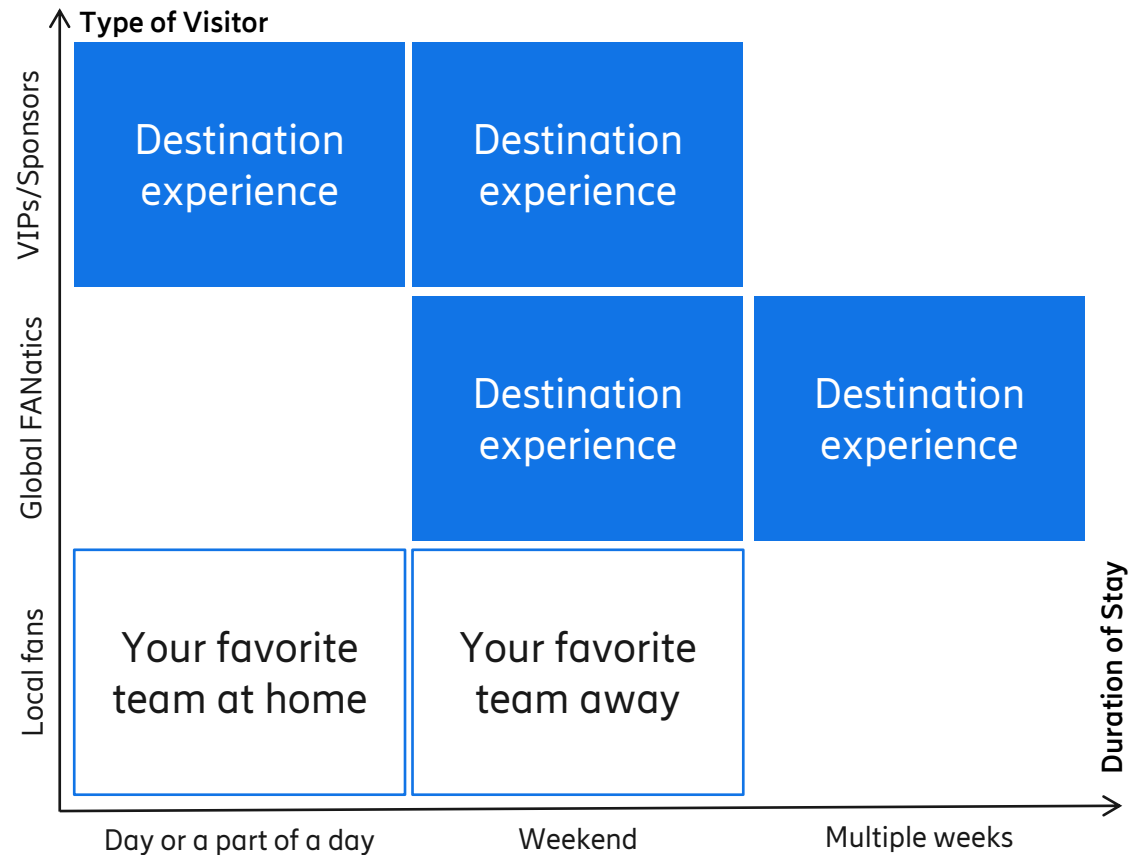
What is new: 20 cities in the US, Canada, and Mexico will host global pinnacle events in 2026

Why it matters: Fans at global pinnacle events expect digital experiences more like those at the annual football final and the greatest spectacle in racing than a typical game day in the professional leagues.

Problem: Fans visiting a global pinnacle event expect a destination experience. They are often part of larger groups and stay for extended periods. A large share are international visitors, with a mix of FANatics and VIPs/Sponsors. The total cost of their trip is significant, and they depend on strong connectivity throughout their stay.

Target outcomes: A high-quality digital experience for global fans, from arrival to departure gate, across all venues, metropolitan locations, and transport routes where they spend large chunks of time during the visit.

Solution innovations: 5G Network augmentations across venues and host cities. Permanent and temporary coverage and capacity upgrades in and around venues and in dedicated fan zones. Tailored connectivity offerings for different fan and sponsor categories, with matching connectivity differentiation, at competition venues. Opportunity for organizers to integrate or offer premium connectivity offerings with premium seating tickets.



Pinnacle events with balls, wheels, and circles have a lot to learn from one another when it comes to expectation-setting

6.5 M tickets available at the global soccer championship in US, Mexico and Canada¹

275k-400k fans attending each of the premier open-wheel races in Canada, Mexico and the US²

172 TB of mobile data traffic was generated at the historic 500-mile race in Indianapolis in 2025³

24 commercial partners for the global soccer championship⁴

1.) [FIFA World Cup ticketing programme launches in September](#). September 10, 2025 .

2.) [Formula 1's record breaking 2025 season in numbers](#), December 19, 2025

3.) [Verizon dominates Indy 500 Data Connectivity](#), May 29, 2025

4.) [Commercial Partnerships, FIFA](#), March 23, 2026

Global spectators are different: They stay for multiple days, often travel in groups, and include passionate fans, business clients, and corporate sponsors.

Soccer attendees: 6.5 million fans attend the global soccer championship across 16 cities in three countries in 2026. 48 qualifying teams play 104 games over 39 days. The average stay for visitors is expected to range from 10 to 16 days, depending on origin.

Premier open-wheel racing attendees: The first major sports documentary series has boosted attendance worldwide for the premier open-wheel racing series. The US, Canada, and Mexico host five races during 3-day long weekends: Austin (>400k attendees in 2024), Mexico City (>400k), Montreal (352k), Las Vegas (>300k 2025), and Miami (275k).

The historic 500-mile event in Indianapolis: Verizon saw 172 TB of traffic in its network in 2025. 1/3 of the traffic happened inside the venue and 2/3 outside. ¾ of the data traffic in the venue was downstream to fans, and ¼ was upstream from fans. This single day with 350,000 fans generated >40X the average mobile data traffic during regular-season football games.

Sponsors: Corporate sponsors are an important group of attendees at pinnacle events. A group expecting experiences above and beyond what consumers and enterprises can buy. The organizers of the big soccer tournament have three sponsorship tiers, with 24 commercial partners at the top, plus ~50 host city supporters engaged.

Bottom line: Soccer and car racing series set the bar high for destination experiences in 2026

Status Quo

Undifferentiated fan and sponsor experiences in venues

Leverage the existing 5G infrastructure at the venues that will be part of the 2026 super cycle

All experiences are based on universal connectivity

Take a Step

5G network augmentation that is limited to venues

Augment 5G networks at all venues to the standards defined by the annual football final

Extend the digital augmentation to soccer- and racing-specific features.

Build Momentum

5G network augmentation across venues and host cities

Augment 5G networks at all venues and across cities to the standards defined by the annual football final

Augment 5G networks at the main areas that are part of the destination experience: tourist attractions, public transportation routes, tail-gating areas, plus hospitality and entertainment districts

Lead Change

Special digital experience offerings for global fans

Target international offerings with dedicated offerings for the duration of their experience

Tiered connectivity offerings matching the span from entry-level tickets to sponsors in corporate suites



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<https://www.ericsson.com/en/5g/fan-experience-sports-entertainment>